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ABSTRACT

The importance of defining the college experience in specific terms in publications for prospective students is discussed. The academic area is the most vital to describe, since college work differs greatly from high school in the emphases on academic diversity, self-initiative, and study outside the classroom. Publications should describe experiences of the typical student week during the freshman year, as well as descriptions of opportunities for internships, cooperative education, and independent study. They should also explain the rationale for required courses (i.e., English composition helps in communicating thoughts clearly), and show how course work is a prerequisite to advanced work and to a career. The point is that understanding the academic environment is achieved through specificity. Examples can be provided of students involved in academic endeavors (e.g., students conducting research, students studying abroad). The quality of the faculty can be established by stating the percentage of faculty who have attained doctoral degrees or awards. Student life can also be described, including clubs and dormitory life, and alumni achievements can be cited to note career possibilities. Numerous examples that could be included in publications for prospective students are provided. (SW)

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Better Publications Through Specificity

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Each day prospective students receive an avalanche of literature urging them to consider one college after another. Student Search, Educational Opportunity Service, communication flow systems and other familiar terms describe the increase in direct mail campaigns competing in the decreasing student market. Upon examination of these mailings one realizes the brochures fail to distinguish one institution from another.

Each college claims to have a quality faculty, outstanding programs, and a proud tradition with photographs depicting stately buildings. There are pictorial cliches of students looking into microscopes, walking across campus and sitting under trees. While each situation looks glamorous enough, there is a failure to communicate the information a student requires during a crucial but naive decision-making time.

The young student has a distorted dream-like view of time, relationship and function. And this is precisely the problem we have to solve by educating students on the specifics of our respective institutions. There is an inability on the student's part to interpret the general information presented and view it in terms college officials would like. But, how graphic should we be

in our publications? Without empirical data there is no hard and fast rule, but I suggest being a bit more specific as a step in the right direction.

An 18-year old has an unrealistic view of time concerning his college years. He doesn't know what takes place at different intervals of a college career. What a student expects to experience in a freshman year may not actually occur until the junior or senior years. It is common for a student to want to experience internships or student teaching in the first year of college. Similarly, what a student may expect upon graduation may not materialize until later in life. It is not unusual for a student to expect to be a middle manager without working up through the organization.

Relationship and function are also difficult for students to put in perspective. The students don't see the academic correlation or purpose of courses and activities. For instance, a freshman computer science major may not understand the necessity of taking liberal arts courses before concentrating on computer courses. One frequently hears the complaint "I am going to be a computer technician, why do I need art appreciation?" They are unable to comprehend that a course in English composition will help them communicate their thoughts clearly in a research project in another course; that the scientific method - observation, measurement, analysis - will help their problem-solving; that

understanding an artist's interpretation of experiences will help them better understand their own experiences. They tend to view everything in isolation rather than in the wholeness of the experience.

For colleges, the answer lies in being specific and realistic. The ability to define the college experience in specific terms using examples, statistics, dates, illustrations and other devices, will make the difference in bringing collegiate life closer to the prospective student. For instance, rather than just mention that you have internships at your campus, provide several examples of existing internships to describe practical education at your college. Describe the internships in a straightforward style.

- A senior student with journalistic goals interned with the New York Times, learning the techniques of reporting.

Probably the most difficult aspect to describe with any degree of interest is the campus facilities. Therefore, be as thorough and factual as possible. The student will find what he or she is interested in. For example:

- The student Union has game and meeting rooms, a lounge and snack bar, the student dining room, student government and activities office.

Finally, remember to bring out the human element of your campus. It is essential to describe your faculty in interesting terms.

For example:

- Dr. John Smith, professor of history, has written a book on George Washington, has appeared on numerous TV shows in 1983, and has been involved in over a hundred research projects with students.

When the institution presents itself in concrete terms, students will be able to place it in relation to their educational goals.

The academic area is the most vital to describe. Many students can relate only to their regimented high school experiences. These experiences included attending the same classes every day, study halls and common curriculum. The college week differs enormously, with greater emphasis on academic diversity, self-initiative and study outside the classroom. Therefore, examples in our literature of the typical student week during the freshman year can be highly informative to prospective students. The upper-level student week should also be described and contrasted to the freshman week, with the interjection of internships, cooperative education, independent study and an emphasis on one's major subjects. If our literature can capture what is taking place sequentially during the college experience, the prospective student will have a better understanding of the demands in relation to time.

But rationale is equally important. Why should the student be compelled to take English, mathematics, history and science?

We must explain how the core curriculum has an impact on the student's college years as well as in later life. We cannot assume the student will understand this relationship. Provide a rationale for all required courses. When the student can understand why the course is required, he or she is developing a better understanding of the meaning of education. For example, if you have a religion requirement, you may describe it as:

- Religion courses at our college are designed to broaden your understanding of all religions and to help develop your own response to the question of faith.

We also must illustrate how course work is a prerequisite to other course work and eventually to career.

Again, understanding of the academic environment is achieved through specificity. Besides showing the typical student week, specific examples of students involved in academic endeavors is necessary. The student who is completing a research paper in the sophomore year, the student who conducts a scientific project during the junior year, and a student who is studying abroad in the senior year bring understanding to the prospective student who never has envisioned such possibilities during the high school years. The experiences could be brought out as follows:

- A mathematics major interested in digital electronics did an independent research project on integrated circuits to better understand equipment he is selling in his own electronics

store.

- A science major is working with local physicians to learn how the computer can be used to diagnose heart problems.
- A French major is studying in France for one semester acquiring a better grasp of the language and customs.

These academic examples need to be numerous enough to provide an accurate picture of the academic arena.

The quality of the faculty can be established by stating the percentage of faculty who have attained doctoral degrees, received awards and have published books and articles. Faculty members who are involved in the planning or building of special equipment should be cited. Finally, how faculty assist their students outside the classroom can add credibility to the publications.

For a student to gain a greater understanding of non-academic student activities, it is necessary to explain clubs that have unusual names, qualifications for membership and the people in charge of the organizations. Quotes from current students are helpful. Student life such as dormitory living and student entertainment are important elements to develop. For example:

- Students in their free time often visit "The "Strip", an assortment of fast-food chains adjacent to the campus.
- Each major residence hall has its own activities budget and may sponsor anything from a backgammon or frisbee tournament to a panel on civil rights.

- Students from the college drama club, "The Crew", sponsor three plays a year, such as, "On Your Toes", "Nine", and "A Streetcar Named Desire". The student president sends special membership invitations to all entering freshmen.

Finally, alumni achievements further accomplish the goal of educating students on the career possibilities after graduation. Examples of recent graduates as well as those who have "made it big" should be mentioned. The year of graduation and major should be tied into the preparation for career accomplishments.

- John Jones, '76, an English major, now is a reporter for "The Cleveland New Dealer".
- Linda Evans, '52, business major, is president of Business Practices Company in Texas.
- Tom Jackson, '72, political science major, is a lawyer and state senator in Tennessee.
- Jan Bridges, '83, education major, is teacher of physical education in a high school in Vermont.

The examples of alumni should represent all academic areas to provide the student with an accurate picture of those graduates who have achieved success in their fields.

Only when a student receives information in concrete terms will he or she be able to make more informed decisions. The way to achieve this is through increased specificity in our publications. As a result, the student will envision new opportunities,

and the college dream, although still glamorous, will become more realistic and obtainable.